

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6757

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2405

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS/ ELAB, PINT, BG

SUBJECT: AAFLI IN BANGLADESH

REF: A. STATE 111250 B. DACCA 2304 C. DACCA 0891

1. NO DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH LABOR SCENE TO DATE HAVE ALTERED RESERVATIONS WE EXPRESSED LAST FEBRUARY IN REF C AS TO WORKABILITY OF AAFLI PROGRAM HERE. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT PURPOSES OF DECLARING ONE-PARTY STATE AND SOON-TO-BE-ANNOUNCED FRONTS IN VARIOUS SECTORS INCLUDING LABOR ARE TO LIMIT CRITICISM OF, OPPOSITION TO, AND INTERFERENCE WITH PRESIDENT MUJIBUR RAHMAN'S IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS "SECOND REVOLUTION." UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, SCOPE FOR VALID TRADE UNION ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENT IS, DESPITE BDG PROTESTATIONS TO THE CONTRARY, LIMITED.

2. FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH EMILIO GARZA BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT SHEIKH MONI HAS ATTEMPTED TO QUIET FEARS OF LABOR LEADERS THAT HE WISHES TO USURP THEIR ROLE. HE HAS TOLD THEM HE IS INTERESTED IN THE LABOR FRONT ONLY AS A POLITICAL BASE TO HELP HIM IN HIS GOAL OF EVENTUALLY SUCCEEDING MUJIB AS RULER OF BANGLADESH. HENCE MONI WILL CONTINUE TO ALLOW LABOR LEADERS TO RUN UNION AFFAIRS. THIS STANCE CAN BE INTERPRETED, AS APPARENTLY GARZA DOES, TO MEAN TRADE UNIONS QUA UNIONS WILL CONTINUE TO OPERATE, THAT MONI WILL AID UNIONS IN OBTAINING SOME ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENTS IN EXCHANGE FOR SUPPORT, AND THAT A ROLE THUS EXISTS FOR AAFLI

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IN ASSISTING TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT.

3. WE ARE NOT SO SANGUINE. MONI WILL OWE HIS ALLEGIANCE AND RETENTION OF LABOR POWER TO HIS UNCLE MUJIB, NOT TO THE UNIONS. WE SUSPECT THAT MUJIB'S PARAMOUNT CONCERN AT PRESENT IS A QUIESCENT, DISCIPLINED LABOR FORCE THAT FOLLOWS DIRECTIONS AND INCREASES PRODUCTION. YET WE DOUBT THAT CONDITIONS OF THE ECONOMY AND THE FINANCIAL POSITION OF BDG WILL PERMIT THE GOVERNMENT TO TOTALLY PROVIDE WAGE INCREASES AND FRINGE BENEFITS THAT LABORERS WANT. MUJIB, THEREFORE, WILL NOT BE AMENABLE TO ANY ACTIVITIES THAT FEED LABOR'S DISCONTENT OR APPEAR TO PROVIDE UNION LEADERS WITH FRESH IDEAS ABOUT PRESSURING THE GOVERNMENT TO OBTAIN THEIR ENDS. THUS TRADITIONAL AAFLI EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES COULD WELL BE INTERPRETED AS A CRITICISM OF, IF NOT A THREAT TO, THE MONOLITHIC STATE AND LABOR APPARATUS MUJIB IS NOW DESIGNING WITH, IT MUST BE EMPHASIZED, THE ACTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT AND ADVICE OF MONI.

4. WE RESERVE COMMENT ON THE LABOR FRONT'S POLICIES THAT GARZA IN REF B FINDS UNOBJECTIONABLE TO AAFLI SINCE WE ARE NEITHER PRIVY TO THEM IN DETAIL NOR ABLE TO PREJUDGE WHAT WILL BE THE CONGRUENCE OF PROMISES AND PERFORMANCE. WE ALSO ARE NOT SURE WHAT GARZA MEANT WHEN HE EXPLAINED OULIHAN'S EXPULSION AS "PARTIALLY TO ENSURE THAT ALL INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATIONS HERE ADHERE TO POLICIES OF THE RESTRUCTURED LABOR FRONT." BUT IT STRIKES US THAT OULIHAN'S EXPERIENCE COULD BE INTERPRETED TO MEAN THAT ESPOUSAL OF FREE TRADE UNION PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES ARE CONTRARY TO THE NEW POLICIES. IF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS WILL BE INHERENTLY SUSPECT AND RENDERED MEANINGLESS BY STRICT CONTROLS, THAT WOULD LEAVE AAFLI ONLY WITH VARIOUS COMMODITY PROGRAMS, THE CHARACTER AND DISTRIBUTION OF WHICH MONI MAY WISH TO MONITOR CLOSELY. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE AT ALL THAT MONI HAS A COMMITMENT TO TRADE UNIONISM, LEAST OF ALL IN A DEMOCRATIC FORM. HIS INTEREST IS, AS HE ADMITS, IN POLITICAL POWER AND THAT IS BEST SERVED BY FIRM CONTROL OVER A MONOLITHIC LABOR STRUCTURE IN WHICH HE WILL MAKE THE DECISIONS OF WHO IS REWARDED FOR WHAT. AAFLI
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MAY PROVIDE HIM WITH THE MEANS FOR SOME PAYOFFS TO THE FAITHFUL, BUT IT WILL NOT BE A RELATIONSHIP BENEFICIAL IN THE LONG RUN TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FREE LABOR MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH.

5. OUR VIEW, THUS, IS THAT AAFLI'S ROLE HERE WILL BE ONE OF A MILCH COW. WE DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT AAFLI CAN INFLUENCE THE LABOR FRONT UNDER SHEIKH MONI WHO PRESENTLY

SEES HIS FORTUNES BETTER SERVED BY TIES WITH THE SOCIALIST
COUNTRIES AND WHO IS INCREASINGLY STRIDENT IN HIS ADVOCACY
OF THE MARXIST IDEOLOGY. THE LABOR FRONT UNDER MONI WILL
SIMPLY ENDEAVOR TO USE AAFI FOR ITS OWN BENEFITS IN RE-
GARD BOTH TO COMMODITIES AND AS A SYMBOL OF TENUOUS LINKS
TO FREE TRADE UNIONISM. SUCH AN UNEVEN RELATIONSHIP, MORE-
OVER, WILL NOT HAVE THE STABILITY TO ENSURE THAT AAFI WILL
NOT BE FACED ONCE MORE WITH A GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVE TO
DEPART ONCE MONI FEELS HIS PURPOSES HAVE BEEN SERVED.

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6. THE FOREGOING LEADS US TO THE CONCLUSION THAT AAFI'S
FUTURE HERE IS BLEAK IN TERMS OF CARRYING OUT ITS
MANDATE AND THAT IT WOULD BE FORCED TO OPERATE IN A
MANNER THAT WOULD BELIE THE WORDS "FREE LABOR" IN ITS
VERY NAME.
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